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ABSTRACT

As more and more middle school students come to the classroom with no real, stable connections outside the school setting, it is increasingly important for educators to reach out to them in a variety of ways. This paper addresses that need by offering educators suggestions in the following five areas: (1) comprehending the unique characteristics and needs of young adolescents; (2) providing an accepting climate; (3) designing a curriculum and delivery system based on young adolescents' characteristics and needs; (4) connecting with their parents; and (5) sharing with the students an attitude of caring and compassion. Schools need to be responsive to adolescents' developmental needs, such as the need for diversity, competence and achievement, and for positive interaction with peers and adults. The school environment needs to be a welcoming, supportive, and secure place. The curriculum to achieve such goals would be characterized by the active and cooperative involvement of learners and would use integrated and interdisciplinary themes. Ways that educators can increase parental involvement in the schools are presented and various ideas to think about are outlined. The paper concludes by noting the importance of dealing with the whole child, by addressing social-emotional development as well as intellectual development. (TJQ)

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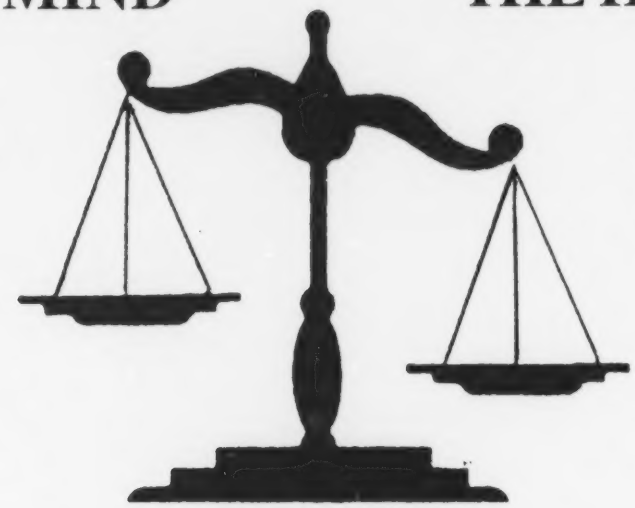
TEACHING THE MIND

TOUCHING THE HEART



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FINDING THE BALANCE IN MIDDLE LEVEL EDUCATION

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SCHOOL DISTRICT 10
GEARHART • SEASIDE • CANNON BEACH

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"And now here is my secret, a very simple secret;
It is only with the heart that one can see rightly,
What is essential is invisible to the eye."

Antoine de Saint-Exupery
The Little Prince
(1943, p. 87)

TEACHING THE MIND, TOUCHING THE HEART
FINDING THE BALANCE IN
MIDDLE LEVEL EDUCATION

An early adolescent writes the following poem -

Adolescent Years

By Brittani Zitting
Grand County Middle School
Moab, Utah

These years are hard,
These years are tough,
These years will change you,
These years are rough.

There is no escaping them,
You have to go through it.
Even though it's difficult,
You just have to do it.

You've passed your childhood,
But you're still not grown up.
You're caught in the middle.
These years are rough.

The middle school years are certainly tough. However, we can help middle schoolers through this turbulent time of life by attempting to touch the the heart, or meet the social-emotional needs, as well as to teach to the intellectual side.

As more and more middle schoolers come to us with no real, stable connections outside the school setting, it is becoming increasingly important for us to reach out to them in a variety of ways. David Hornbeck, a former Maryland school superintendent and chairman of the Carnegie Council's Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents states, "the kids in the middle have been left out. That's unfortunate because those years of 10 to 14 are what I consider to be the **last, best chance to reach youngsters!"**

We can reach out to these "youth adrift" by comprehending the unique characteristics and needs of early adolescents, providing an accepting climate, designing a curriculum and delivery system based on their characteristics and needs, connecting with their parents and sharing with them an attitude of caring and compassion.

IN EXAMINING THE TOPIC OF

TEACHING
THE MIND

TOUCHING
THE HEART

FINDING THE BALANCE IN
MIDDLE LEVEL EDUCATION,
WE WILL LOOK AT FIVE AREAS

COMPREHENSION OF MIDDLE SCHOOL
STUDENTS' NEEDS AND
CHARACTERISTICS

CURRICULUM

CONNECTIONS WITH PARENTS

CLIMATE

COMPASSION AND CARING

COMPREHENSION OF MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS' NEEDS AND CHARACTERISTICS

Comprehension of middle school students' needs and characteristics implies more than just the ability to list those needs and characteristics. In successful middle school classrooms and in successful middle schools knowledge translates into action in developing a program that truly meets the needs of early adolescents.

It is no longer enough to be able to say an early adolescent is -

> "Confused by self-doubt, plaqued with forgetfulness, addicted to extreme fads, preoccupied with peer status, disturbed about physical development, aroused by physiological impulses, stimulated by mass media communication, comforted by daydreams, chafed by restrictions, loaded with purposeless energy, bored by routine, irked by social amenities, veneered with "wise cracks", insulated from responsibility, labelled with delinquency, obsessed with personal autonomy, but destined to years of economic dependency."

It is knowing what to do now that you know the characteristics of an early adolescent. Head knowledge is of little value until it makes that eighteen inch trip to the heart and is put into action. Lipsitz and Johnston have stated in their writings that the process of becoming a more successful middle school **begins** with an understanding of early adolescents and an appreciation of their unique needs. In successful middle schools, this understanding and appreciation of early adolescents drives the development of a program to meet those needs.

Gayle Dorman, in **Middle Grades Assessment Program,** identifies seven developmental needs of early adolescents.

SEVEN DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS OF EARLY ADOLESCENTS AND SOME EXAMPLES OF HOW SCHOOLS CAN BE RESPONSIVE TO THEM

1. THE NEED FOR DIVERSITY

Changes that occur during early adolescence are among the most dramatic of any time in life, and there is a tremendous variation in the nature and rates of these changes. Seventh graders may look nine or nineteen; their emotional and intellectual differences may be as profound as their physical differences. Knowing this, it is impossible to think that early adolescents are "all alike." Diverse opportunities for learning and growing are necessary if early and late developers, concrete and abstract thinkers, and dependent and autonomous youth are to experience healthy development.

SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS -

a. offer a curriculum that is a combination of "basic skills," special interest classes and activities.

b. use a wide variety of learning materials and learning activities in and out of the classroom to reach the various developmental levels as well as a variety of teaching methods.

c. offer a wide variety of clubs and activity groups meeting during and after school hours. The activities tap a diversity of student skills and interests; not all are oriented toward athletics or academics.

2. THE NEED FOR COMPETENCE AND ACHIEVEMENT

Many early adolescents feel a heightened sense of anxiety about their academic, social and athletic abilities. Early adolescents need to know that they are capable of learning and that what they do is valued by others whom they respect. Early adolescents are hungry for opportunities to succeed at something. Their faltering self-esteem needs successes to build confidence and a sense of worthiness. An important part of establishing a sense of identity is finding out what one does well. The types of attention and confirmation they receive in the school environment are especially important.

SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS -

a. offer students frequent, genuine, specific praise for their efforts. Praise and recognition is distributed among a high percentage of students.

b. have a guidance program, focusing on self-understanding and personal development, accessible to all students.

c. use frequent testing or checking of student work to disgnose the students' strengths and weaknesses. This diagnosis, not only a prescribed curriculum, directs instruction.

3. THE NEED FOR STRUCTURE AND CLEAR LIMITS

Even though students need to "test limits" and "assert their independence," they also need to know what to expect and see consequences for their actions. Explicit boundaries help provide security for the early adolescent. They differ from younger children, though, in that they are increasingly capable of participating with adults in framing their own rules and limits. However, it is the adult's role to provide whatever structure each early adolescent needs at a particular time so that the adolescent will not be overwhelmed by freedom but will have opportunities to develop self-direction.

SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS -

a. approach discipline on a school-wide basis rather than each teacher "doing their own thing." This provides consistency and structure that is critically important to early adolescents.

b. view discipline as opportunities to teach appropriate behavior rather than a negative confrontation. Discipline is viewed as an integral part of the overall program and not as a burden.

c. have clearly stated rules for all students and these rules are preceived as reasonable and fair.

d. share the responsibility of student supervision and believe that all staff are responsible for all students in all areas of the school. Teachers deal with inappropriate behavior whenever and where ever it occurs.

e. spend a high percentage of classroom time on learning activities. Minimal time is spent giving instructions, arranging for equipment or passing out papers. Instruction is rarely interrupted by disciplinary or loudspeaker announcements.

4. THE NEED FOR MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY

As early adolescents become more independent and begin to think about other people and larger social problems, they want to assume new responsibilities, to have a role in making the rules that affect them, and to help other people. If they are to learn independence and responsibility, they need opportunities to take the initiative and to have a meaningful voice in making decisions that affect them. Adults help meet this need when they model democratic decision making, provide youth the structure they need to make wise decisions and are willing to allow young people to think creatively, to act on their ideas and to experience the logical and natural consequences of their decisions.

SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS

a. encourage students to initiate ideas and activities and provide an appropriate forum for this to happen. All staff structure opportunities for students to express, evaluate and try out ideas.

b. offer an extensive intramural or activity program open to all students. Participation, not competition, is emphasized.

c. display student work on bulletin boards, walls, tables in classrooms, and other areas throughout the building and in the community.

d. integrate service-learning opportunities for students into the curriculum.

e. allow students opportunities to make contributions to the school. They contribute to the upkeep and appearance of the school. For example, they may build furniture, clean their own tables in the cafeteria, pick up trash or decorate bulletin boards. Students also serve as teacher aides, media center aides and office aides

5. THE NEED FOR POSITIVE SOCIAL INTERACTION WITH PEERS AND ADULTS

The early adolescent continues to need a close relationship with family and peers. Adolescents look to peers for association, companionship and criticism regarding their new social roles. They look to parents for affection, identification, values and help in solving large problems. Young adolescents also need opportunities to relate to adults other than their parents. They need the security and sense of being liked that comes from positive social interaction with adults. They also need to see the modeling of appropriate social behavior by adults whom they admire.

SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS -

a. make sure every student has a close and supportive relationship with at least one staff member.

b. actively encourage multicultural and multiracial understanding.

c. find ways to integrate social and academic learning.

d. vary classroom seating arrangements, including small groups, pairs, individuals, and total group. Frequently, small groups of students are working independently on projects or assignments.

e. encourage students to discuss with each other what they are learning and to ask questions of each other as well as of the teacher.

6. THE NEED FOR OPPORTUNITIES FOR SELF EXPLORATION AND SELF-DEFINITION

This need is directly related to the changing sense of identity that occurs in early adolescence. If young adolescents are to establish a sense of who they are and what they can do they need time alone to sort out all the changes that are so rapidly occuring. They need time with peers and time with adults to test and talk about their concerns and ideas about themselves. Opportunities for self-exploration and self-definition are essential if adolescents are to complete the task of forming a sense of identity.

SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS -

a. encourage students to think for themselves. Imagination and questioning are expected and encouraged.

b. offer art, music, technology and drama as a part of the regular curriculum. Self-expression and mastery of basic techniques are emphasized in these classes.

c. provide students ample opportunities to explore areas in which they have a special interest, ability or concern through core classes and special interest courses. Exposure to ideas and skills, rather than mastery of subject matter, is frequently a teaching goal.

d. incorporate materials on minorities into the curriculum for all students.

e. include Advisor/Advisee programs which provide opportunities for self-exploration. In successful advisory programs, students learn as much about themselves as they do about each other.

7. THE NEED FOR FREQUENT PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Early adolescence is characterized as a time of physical changes and energetic activity. Taps, pokes, and occasional hugs and punches are ways in which early adolescents define themselves and each other. Sitting still is not only difficult but sometimes painful as well. Early adolescents need opportunities to vent their energy through physical activities of their own choosing and through activities designed to improve muscle coordination.

SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS -

a. encourage teachers to incorporate some movement within the classroom setting to allow for some physical activity.

b. provide plenty of room in corridors and classrooms for movement from one place to another.

c. provide designated places where students can be noisy and engage in physical activity.

d. have physical education classes that emphasize body coordination, basic skills, lifelong sports and noncompetitive sports.

e. provide a physical education program that recognizes a wide range of normal physical development among early adolescents and reflects understanding of the concerns of early adolescents about their physical development.

CURRICULUM

"Educators know intuitively that to truly engage a students' mind, we must be willing to draw close to a student's heart."

Halimah P. Butte in MSJ, March 1993

"Education is its fullest sense has to involve heart as well as mind, attitude as well as information, spirit as well as scholarship."

John Lounsbury in MSJ, November 1991

Curriculum, and the delivery system used, in a middle school that carefully balances students' intellectual needs with their physical, social, and emotional needs will be marked by the following characteristics:

- **ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT OF LEARNERS**

  The curriculum will provide opportunities for middle level students to be actively involved with their learning. John Lounsbury cites the following as part of the rationale for this active learning.

  I remember:

  10% of what I read
  20% of what I hear
  30% of what I see
  50% of what I see and hear
  70% of what I discuss with others
  80% of what I experience by doing
  95% of what I teach others

- ## COOPERATIVE INVOLVEMENT OF THE LEARNERS

M. Gail Jones, in her article "Cooperative Learning Developmentally Appropriate for Middle Level Students" shares the many ways that the goals of cooperative learning match with the developmental needs of early adolescents. She concludes that "strong evidence is accumulating to support the premise that cooperative learning is a developmentally appropriate and effective teaching methodology for middle school students. The varied development of the early adolescent, along with the strong drive for peer interaction makes team learning a good match."

- ## INTEGRATED AND INTERDISCIPLINARY THEMES

Suzanne Krogh, a professor of education at Western Washington University, feels the program students encounter in school should mirror the real world they will enter. "The real world isn't divided into separate disciplines. When instruction jumps from one discipline to another every 45 minutes, learning is fragmented unnecessarily."

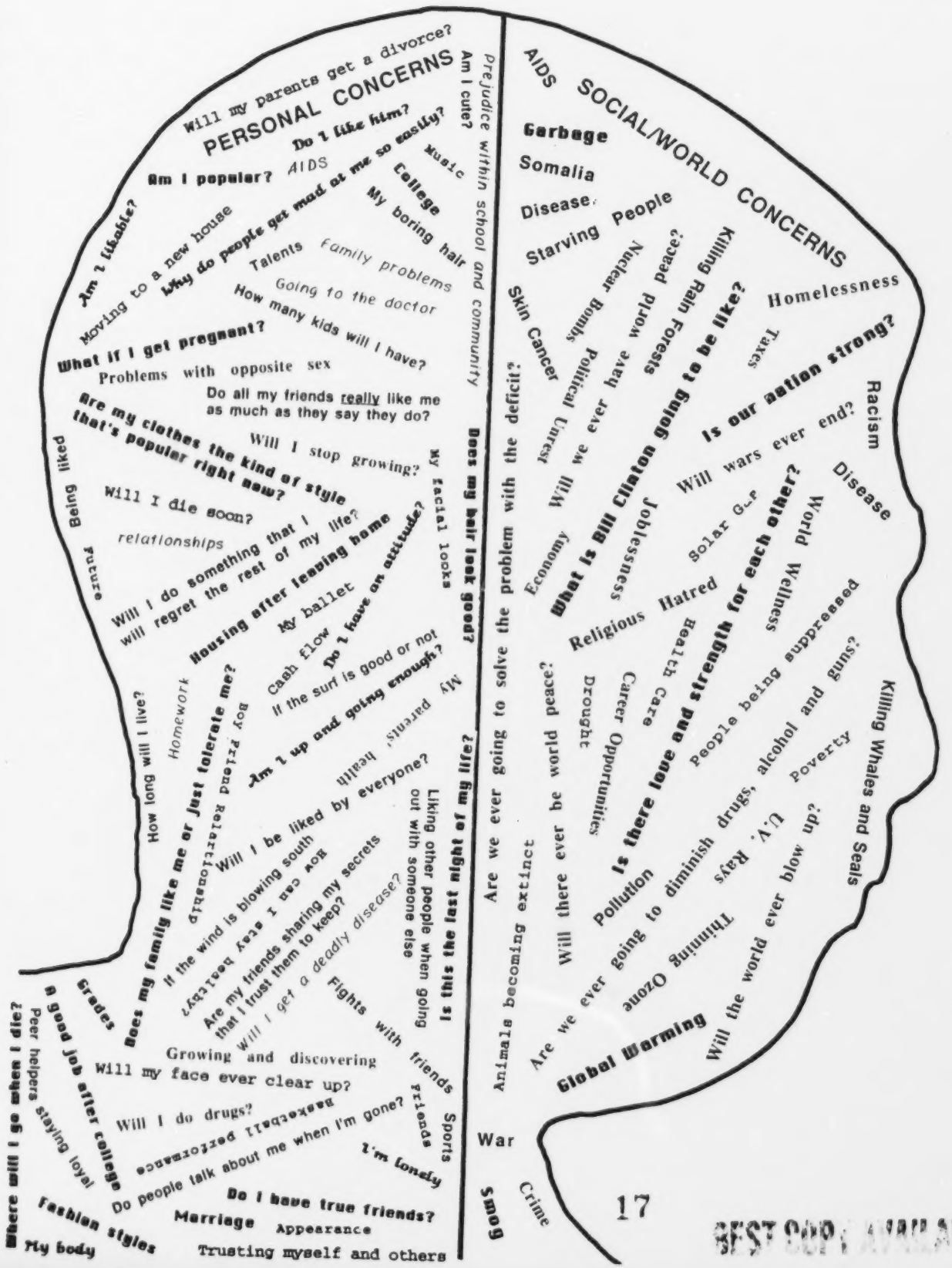
Susan Kovalik, an educational consultant, points out that "interdisciplinary instruction provides connections among subject areas so that students can better understand that their learning has application to real life, to real topics - that learning is not just isolated bits of fact in a vacuum."

- ## DIRECT RELATIONSHIP TO THE DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE OF THE LEARNER

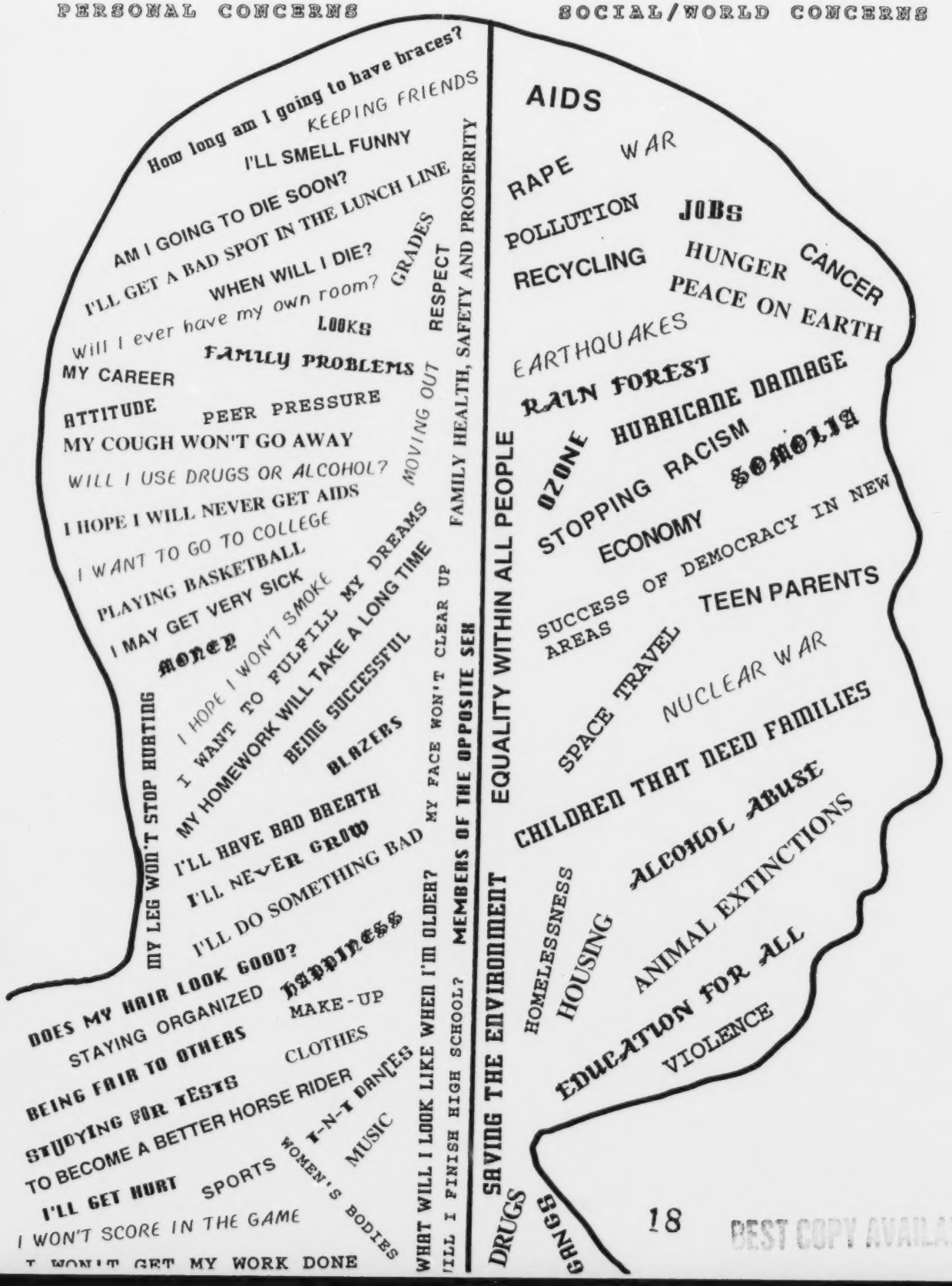
James Beane, in his book A MIDDLE SCHOOL CURRICULUM from Rhetoric to Reality, proposes a general education curriculum whose centerpiece is organized around themes drawn from the intersection of early adolescents' personal concerns and their larger social/world concerns.

Other components of the curriculum would be the **skills** needed to fully investigate these themes, such as problem solving, social action skills, valuing, reflective thinking, and larger **concepts** that would permeate the curriculum, such as democracy, human dignity and cultural diversity.

WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?



WHAT'S IN A MIDDLE SCHOOLER'S HEAD?



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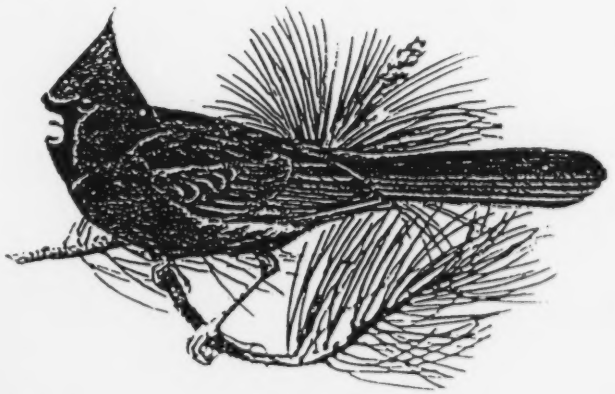
THE CHALLENGE OF TEACHING IN THE 90's AND BEYOND

I recently heard this poem, written by a college English professor, and I feel compelled to share it with you as we look ahead at our challenge for the 90's and beyond.

His feather flame doused dull
by icy cold,
the cardinal hunched
into the rough, green feeder
but ate no seed.



Through binoculars I saw
festered and useless
his beak, broken
at the root.

Then two; one blazing, one gray
rode the swirling weather
into my vision
and lighted at his side.

Unhurried, as if possessing
unlimited patience,
they cracked sunflowers
and fed him
beak to wounded beak
choice meats.

Each morning and afternoon
the winter long,
the odd threesome,
that trinity of need,
returned and ate
their meal
of broken seed.

Each day our paths cross those of wounded children. More often than not, their wounds, and the depth at which they have been wounded, are hidden from our view. Some of their wounds are related to abuse; physical, emotional, sexual. In others, their wounds are smashed dreams, lost hope or the result of endless failures.

As resources dwindle around us, educators of the 90's and beyond are going to be increasingly called upon to reach out to these children and help heal their wounds. Increasingly, our curriculum, while its content will still be important, will be more importantly used to build bridges to the children we come into contact with. We will need to carefully evaluate both the curriculum content and our methodology, making sure that both afford us the opportunity to develop relationships with the wounded children who pass through our classes. Far too often, curriculum becomes a barrier between us and the children, separating them into various categories, rather than a bridge to reach them and allow them to reach out to us. My vision for middle level education is that we would be a place that provides programs and activities that heal rather than exacerbate the hurts.

We will be called upon to continue to evaluate all that we do and change that that no longer meets the needs of the ever-changing population we serve. We will be called upon to continue to leave our comfort zones that provide us with safety and security and to grow beyond ourselves in new directions. This growth will allow us to more effectively come along side our wounded students and meet their needs.

While we continue to grow to meet the challenges, we most certainly will experience growing pains along the way. However, we will also receive incredible rewards in knowing that we have reached out to the students who cross our path, and beak to wounded beak, have helped them survive the winter of their early adolescent years.

Thanks for your work with the many wounded children who cross your path. Many years from now, they probably will remember very little about your curriculum, but they will remember that you cared and you reached out to them in a special way, that only you can. Thanks for caring!

CONNECTIONS WITH PARENTS

By allowing parents opportunities to connect with schools in a variety of ways and to connect with us in the process, we will be able to develop deeper, trusting relationships. The trust developed, along with the time shared together, will allow both us and parents to share more deeply about their children. This sharing will allow us additional opportunities to connect with their children and to have a true partnership with the parents in their education.

Research clearly demonstrates that parent involvement with schools results in the following benefits to students:

- Academic achievement rises
- Student behavior improves
- Student motivation increases
- Attendance becomes more regular
- Student dropout rates are lower
- Students have more positive attitudes toward homework
- Parents and community support increases

Research also demonstrates that a planned program of parent involvement has a positive effect on parents. When they are involved, they:

- Understand more about the educational program than in previous years
- Rate teachers' interpersonal skills high
- Appreciate teacher efforts
- Change their behavior at home to be more supportive of their child
- Rate teachers' abilities higher

In "Essential Elements of Strong Parent Involvement Programs," authors David Williams, Jr. and Nancy Chavkin state, "the foundation upon which effective parent involvement programs must be built is the primary concept of an equal, mutually supportive partnership." Parents have a strong interest in being equal partners with schools in the education of their children.

Knowing this, how do we involve parents in the school? In an article entitled "What Principals Should Know About Parent Involvement," author Joyce Epstein identifies five ways for parents to be involved. She feels that a comprehensive program for encouraging parent involvement will include all five.

1. BASIC OBLIGATIONS OF PARENTS

This refers to the responsibilities of families to meet their children's basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter and ensure their health and safety; to the parenting and child-rearing skills needed to prepare children for school; to the continual need to supervise, discipline, and guide children at each age level; to provide school supplies and a place for school work; and to the need to build positive home conditions that support school learning and behavior appropriate for each grade level.

2. BASIC OBLIGATIONS OF SCHOOLS

This refers to the communications from school to home about school programs and children's progress.

To inform parents about the school:

- Newsletters, calendars and schedules
- Special events
- Handbooks with school goals, programs, services, school rules, dress policies
- Open House

To inform parents about their children:
report card grades, test scores
informal evaluations, teacher-parent conferences

3. PARENT INVOLVEMENT AT SCHOOL

This refers to parent volunteers who assist teachers, administrators, and children in classrooms or in other areas of the school. It also refers to parents who come to school to support student performances, sports, or other events, or to attend workshops or other programs for their own education or training.

To assist teachers and students with lessons, on class trips, at class parties or other classroom activities

To assist administrators, teachers, and staff in school cafeteria, library, computer labs, other school activities

To assist organized parent groups in fund-raising, community relations, political awareness, program development

To attend students' assemblies, sports events, special presentations

To attend workshops, discussion groups, training sessions for parents

4. PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN LEARNING ACTIVITIES AT HOME

This refers to parent-initiated activities or child-initiated requests for help and ideas or instructions from teachers for parents to monitor or assist their own children at home on learning activities that are coordinated with the children's classwork.

To develop child's social and personal skills

To contribute to basic skills education

To contribute to advanced skills and enrichment education

5. PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN GOVERNANCE AND ADVOCACY

This refers to parents' taking decision-making roles in school, district, state or national committees or ogranizations. It also refers to parents and community activists in independent advocacy groups that monitor the schools and work for school improvement.

GOVERNANCE:

To participate in PTA, PTO, or other organizations, formal and informal school committees, parent advisory councils, or other groups at the school, district and state levels such as -

Participation in school improvement plans

Helping formulate or revise school policies, program priorities, curricula, or budgets

Participation in the selection of new principal, teachers or staff

Participation in other school-related activities mandated by federal or state funded programs

ADVOCACY:

To serve as independent, self-directed reviewers, reporters and "loving critics" to provide the community with information about schools, eduction decisions, and local, state, and/or national issues that affect education such as -

Analyzing district, state or federal budgets

Offering workshops and courses

Studying and reporting on school goals or classroom processes

Working to increase funding, influence legislation, or serve as "watchdogs" against discrimination in desegregation and integration policies

16 Ways To Involve Parents

1. Ask parents to read to their children regularly or to listen to the children read aloud.
2. Loan books, workbooks, and other materials to parents.
3. Ask parents to take their children to the library.
4. Ask parents to get their children to talk about what they did that day in class.
5. Give an assignment that requires the children to ask their parents questions.
6. Ask parents to watch a specific television program with their children and to discuss the show afterward.
7. Suggest ways for parents to include their children in any of their own educationally enriching activities.
8. Send home suggestions for games or group activities, related to the children's schoolwork, that can be played by either parent and child, or by child and siblings.
9. Suggest how parents might use home materials and activities to stimulate their children's interest in reading, math, and other subjects.
10. Establish a formal agreement whereby parents supervise and assist children in completing homework tasks.
11. Establish a formal agreement whereby parents provide rewards and/or penalties based on the children's school performance or behavior.
12. Ask parents to come to *observe* the classroom (not to "help") for part of a day.
13. Explain to parents certain techniques for teaching, for making learning materials, or for planning lessons.
14. Give a questionnaire to parents so they can evaluate their children's progress or provide some other form of feedback.
15. Ask parents to sign homework to ensure its completion.
16. Ask parents to provide spelling practice, math drills, and practice activities, or to help with workbook assignments.

From
What Principals Should Know About Parent Involvement
by Joyce L. Epstein
Principal, January 1987, pp. 6-9

Some Ideas To Think About

There is no recipe or blueprint for parent involvement that can be commonly applied in every school setting. The examples presented in the categories that follow are proven practices that have worked well at the secondary school level.

The categories represent a broad spectrum of parent involvement activities that should be included in a total home-school relations effort.

The communication and support components include most of the traditional parent involvement activities.

Parents as teachers and learners are categories that include activities designed to raise student achievement.

Parents as advocates include activities that will result in legislative and policy changes to improve schools.

Communication

Good home-school communication can be improved without large sums of money. As a first step, enhance the traditional methods by developing these techniques into a more systematic approach. Recognize that the most effective techniques are those that rely on direct, personal contact between educators and parents.

A focus of home-school relations at the elementary level is to promote parent participation at school. This expectation is unrealistic at the secondary school level. Increasing the level of parent-student involvement at home is a realistic and priority goal. Communication, necessarily, becomes even more important. Following are some ideas to think about:

- Use multiple means to contact parents: handbooks, newsletters, notes home, telephone calls, and parent-teacher conferences.
- Establish an open, friendly climate including a parent lounge with comfortable furniture, desk, telephone, and reading materials.
- Have all teachers send home an outline of their class objectives, homework expectations, how they may be contacted, and how parents can help.
- Set aside a specific time each week for the principal to meet with parents without appointment.
- Establish a telephone hotline schedule, setting aside a specific time each week when parents can reach the principal by phone.
- Schedule parent-teacher lunches in the cafeteria on a regular basis.
- Ensure the school provides staff members who are fluent in the language of ethnic groups.
- Initiate a program of frequent questionnaires to parents to give them an opportunity to evaluate their child's progress and provide feedback to the school staff members.
- Conduct special evening meetings for parents of students "at risk" academically. Employ teachers to participate in these small group discussions.
- Establish a routine phone calling schedule so all parents are contacted.
- Conduct a joint parent-teacher home-school relations conference annually to promote better communication.

Parents as Teachers

Former U.S. Secretary of Education William Bennett states, "Not every teacher is a parent, but every parent is a teacher."

The power of parents to affect student achievement is considerable. In addition to the specific skills and knowledge imparted, parents who are involved give their children a sense of the importance of education.

Some ideas to promote parents as teachers are:

- Develop a test parents can administer to their students at home to check their progress in meeting skills and competencies required for high school graduation.

- Develop packets of homework activities that are keyed to instructional objectives. Standardize and simplify to maximize parent participation (family friendly).
- Provide parents with complete information about their child's progress, including results on standardized tests.
- Organize a directory of parent resource people who can be called on for class presentations and study trips.
- Provide suggestions to parents on techniques to create a good study environment at home.
- Promote adopt-a-school programs that utilize parents as tutors.
- Provide parents with information about how to ask questions and how to discuss homework.
- Establish a districtwide and schoolwide homework policy.

Parents as Supporters of Activities

It may not be realistic to expect parents of secondary school students to be as involved in school activities as parents of elementary students. However, getting more parents involved is a powerful component of a comprehensive high school parent involvement plan. This can be achieved with some effort.

In addition to the obvious value of parent support of school activities, participation also enhances communication and the other parent involvement components (parents as learners, teachers, and advocates).

Think about these ideas:

- Continue the traditional activities that involve all parents: Open House, Back-to-School Night. Involve a parent-teacher planning committee to improve participation and effectiveness of these activities.
- Plan and conduct a series of special performances and assemblies that highlight every aspect of the curriculum for parents. Include appreciation activities for *teachers* and *parents*.
- Expand Booster Club participation. Add an Academic Booster Club.
- To encourage parents to visit classrooms, establish a special time for groups of parents to visit with the principal.
- Provide opportunities for parents and community members to participate as tutors.

Parents as Learners

To reach their potential as communicators, teachers, supporters, and advocates, there is a great deal parents must learn.

The most effective parent education programs are those developed and planned cooperatively by parents and school staff members. Consider the following successful high school parent education activities:

- Provide workshops for parents on how to help their child. Typical topics include information about homework, vocational education programs, drug abuse, teenage suicide, college admission, dropout prevention, parenting skills, and information about curricular areas (math, science, computers, etc.).
- Organize field trips with parents and students together.
- Provide parents with learning materials.
- Suggest parents "shadow" their student to experience a typical day.
- Offer classes where students can work together with parents.
- Provide information to parents about community resources available to help them.

Parents as Advocates

One outcome of an effective parent involvement plan is the emergence of a group of parents who are educational advocates.

Because of this experience and knowledge, they are available and willing to serve in many capacities to improve our schools. Some possibilities to involve these parents include:

- Encourage parents to serve on school committees to assist in developing poli-

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cies to address school problems such as drug abuse and smoking on campus.

- Promote the involvement of parent advocates on school site councils, PTA organizations, and related school-community councils.
- Encourage parents to participate in leadership roles on school-related political issues: lobbying in person, organizing letter-writing campaigns, speaking at forums, for example.
- Provide training for parents who are willing to serve in leadership roles

Getting Started

The ultimate goal in parent involvement is to have a comprehensive plan in place that includes all the components described. An assessment of each component, followed by a specific plan of action, will result in ongoing benefits to teachers, parents, and students.

From a practical perspective, it may take several months to implement. Don't wait! If there are things that can be done immediately, do them. Almost anything and everything you do to improve parent involvement yields immediate returns.

As you implement your parent involvement activities, consider the following factors that will enhance success:

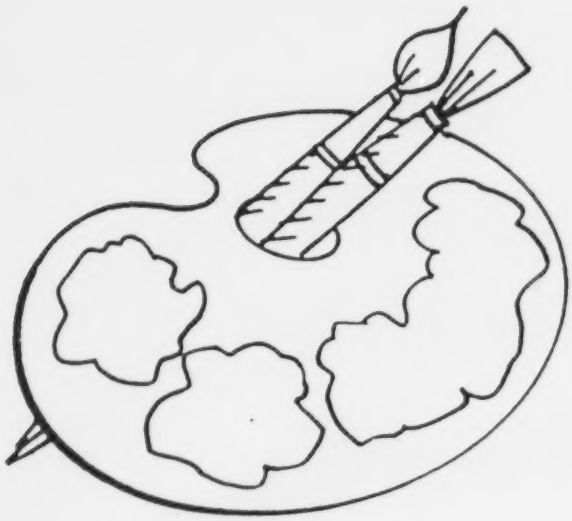
- *Support and Commitment.* Having the support of your teachers and staff members is essential. Formal approval and support by the superintendent and the board of trustees will result in the momentum needed to overcome any initial resistance. A school district commitment of a budget, even though it's not substantial, gives further legitimacy and importance to the plan.
- *Involvement.* Direct involvement of teachers and parents in the planning stage is imperative. To be most effective, it must be "their" program.
- *Visibility.* High visibility will sustain the effort to implement parent involvement activities over a long period of time.

Formal presentations and progress reports to the parent organizations, teachers, and board of trustees are effective. Presentations at teacher workshops and staff development meetings highlight the special effort being made. Media coverage recognizing special efforts by parents and teachers will further enhance success.

- *Climate.* School staff members (administrators, teachers, secretaries, custodians, etc.) must make a genuine effort to make parents feel welcome. The importance of parents is further emphasized by providing transportation for those needing it. Having child care at school will make a big different for many of those hard-to-reach parents.
- *Meaningful Activities.* Parent involvement activities should be relevant. Find out what parents are most interested in and design your activities accordingly.

A high school principal who believes in parent involvement may be the single most important variable.

From
Start At Home To Improve Home-School Relations
By Harold Hester
NASSP Bulletin, vol. 73, no. 513, January 1989, pp. 23-27



Encourage Their "Art"

by

Jim White
Principal, Gearhart Elementary School
Gearhart, Oregon

Recently I did one of the hardest things I've ever been asked to do. Along with Ed Rippet, Business Manager for Seaside School District,I performed the grave side service for Brian Olson, a 19 year old graduate of Seaside High School. Brian was attending Arizona Automotive Institute in Phoenix and working the graveyard shift at a gas station when he was shot and killed during a robbery.

In preparation for the service, considerable time was spent listening to the family as they recounted memorable segments of Brian's life. These special memories were combined with memories of friends and put into chronological order to provide an overview of Brian's life.

During this time of sharing with the family, only one teacher from Brian's nine years of elementary and middle school experience was mentioned. The family remembered with fondness, Mrs. Knispel, Brian's second grade teacher.

Before the parents could explain what this teacher had done eleven years prior that made her worthy of special mention at a time like this, my mind raced trying to anticipate what they might say. As I quickly thought of the various philosophical debates we experience at the elementary level, I assumed this teacher's philosophy about some aspect of elementary education closely matched that of this family. Perhaps this teacher provided the students with a strong phonics based reading program. Maybe Mrs. Knispel, even eleven years ago, carefully integrated reading, language, spelling and writing and offered a whole language approach. Possibly she was particularly good at teaching basic math concepts using manipulative to help students grasp abstract concepts using concrete objects.

Before I could go further with this mental exercise, the parents ended my speculation when they said, "Mrs. Knispel appreciated Brian's art." Brian had surgery while in the second grade. During a visit to the hospital, in addition to a card signed by all the students, Mrs. Knispel brought a sketchpad and colored pencils. Through tears, the parents related the many times Mrs. Knispel encouraged, appreciated and doted over Brian's art. Through High school, this remained an area of success for Brian.

All students have an area of "art" where they are successful. However, it is not always the area we are looking for. Their "art" might be turning in completed assignments on time or staying on task. However, like Brian's,their art might be drawing. Possibly it's painting, music, drama or sports.Maybe it's an ability to work especially well with other students or an unusual care and concern for others.

From the depths of their despair, after having lost their only son, the Olson family fondly remembered a teacher who took time to appreciate,encourage and dote over their son's art. While in the midst of philosophical debates or the search for new methodologies, I encourage you to encourage your staffs to take time to recognize, appreciate and encourage the "art" of all their students, whatever it might be. In the end, it might be all that's remembered.

CLIMATE

In the book, TRIBES, A Process for Social Development and Cooperative Learning by Jeanne Gibbs, the climate of a school or classroom is defined as "the atmosphere or feeling that pervades it daily. It is the music underlying the words . . . an energy that either contributes to or detracts from the children's social development and opportunity to learn." Gibbs goes on to say that a positive climate evolves out of . . .

- an atmosphere of trust
- a sense of belonging and community
- involvement in decision making
- kindness and encouragement from peers
- teacher's energy and morale
- teacher's non-judgemental attitude, fairness and congruent communication to students
- clear expectations, goals and learning outcomes
- classroom and school practices concerning cooperation rather than competition

Lawrence Lezotte and his colleagues define climate as "the norms, beliefs and attitudes reflected in institutional patterns and behavioral practices that enhance or impede student achievement."

What makes schools different from others is not the characteristics of the students or the tangible, structural factors of the school, but rather what goes on in the school building, the climate.

In middle schools where teaching the mind and touching the heart are balanced, adults pay as much attention to the social-emotional climate and they do to the academic climate. A middle school with a healthy social-emotional climate will exhibit the following qualities -

- The school is an encouraging, welcoming, supporting place.
- The school is a secure place.
- The school anticipates student needs and fills them without fanfare.
- The school is a trusting place.
- The school is a civil place.

What do these schools look like? What would you see in a school with a healthy social-emotional climate? The following are charcteristics observed by J. Howard Johnston and J. Maria Ramos de Perez as they spent time in ten middle schools nationally recognized for their effectiveness with early adolescents.

THE SCHOOL IS AN ENCOURAGING, WELCOMING, SUPPORTING PLACE

- Interactions among students and between students and teachers are encouraged.
- Not only do teachers make themselves available to students, they engage students in conversations.
- Visitors and parents are encouraged to come to the school and are welcomed when they do.
- Students are encouraged when teachers see them perform at events not related to the formal academic program.
- Teachers praise each other as they do their students.
- There is a pervasive feeling of caring throughout the building.

THE SCHOOL IS A SECURE PLACE

- One of the most evident qualities of the social-emotional climate is that students feel safe in school-safe not only from physical harm but also from psychological and emotional harm and abuse.
- Since the academic climate is designed to meet the unique needs of the students thereby reducing frustration, there is little evidence of physical aggression, property damage or hostility.
- There is little evidence of fighting, vandalism and racial and ethnic hostility.
- The sense of security is also derived from the absence of ridicule or embarrassment.
- There is much individual attention given by the teacher, but no effort is made to draw group attention to individual students unless the student desires it.

HOW TO BE AN EFFECTIVE LISTENER

from Communication Workshop; A Problem-Solving Curriculum for Adolescent School Groups
by Bob Gans-Morse and Carol Beatty

THINGS TO DO

Use **BODY LANGUAGE** and facial expressions that indicate interest.

Maintain eye contact.
Lean forward, smile, nod, etc.

EXPAND conversations.

Ask questions that connot be answered simply by "yes" or "no."

CLARIFY messages.

Check out if what you heard is what the speaker meant.
Such as:
"Do you mean that . . .?"
"I hear you saying . . ."

REFLECT feelings.

Guess the speaker's feelings by making statements such as:
"I bet you're glad."
"You seem angry."

THINGS TO AVOID

Distracting

Judging

Interrupting

Changing the subject

Just listen. It is not always necessary for you to propose a solution.

FIGHTING FAIR
What is the other person's side of the story?
We both have the same feelings even if we disagree.
Ancient history doesn't count.
Name calling doesn't help.
Blaming won't do any good
What is making me angry?

RULES FOR FIGHTING FAIR

1. Identify the problem.

2. Focus on the problem.

3. Attack the problem, not the person.

4. Listen with an open mind.

5. Treat the other person's feelings with respect.

6. Take responsibility for your actions.

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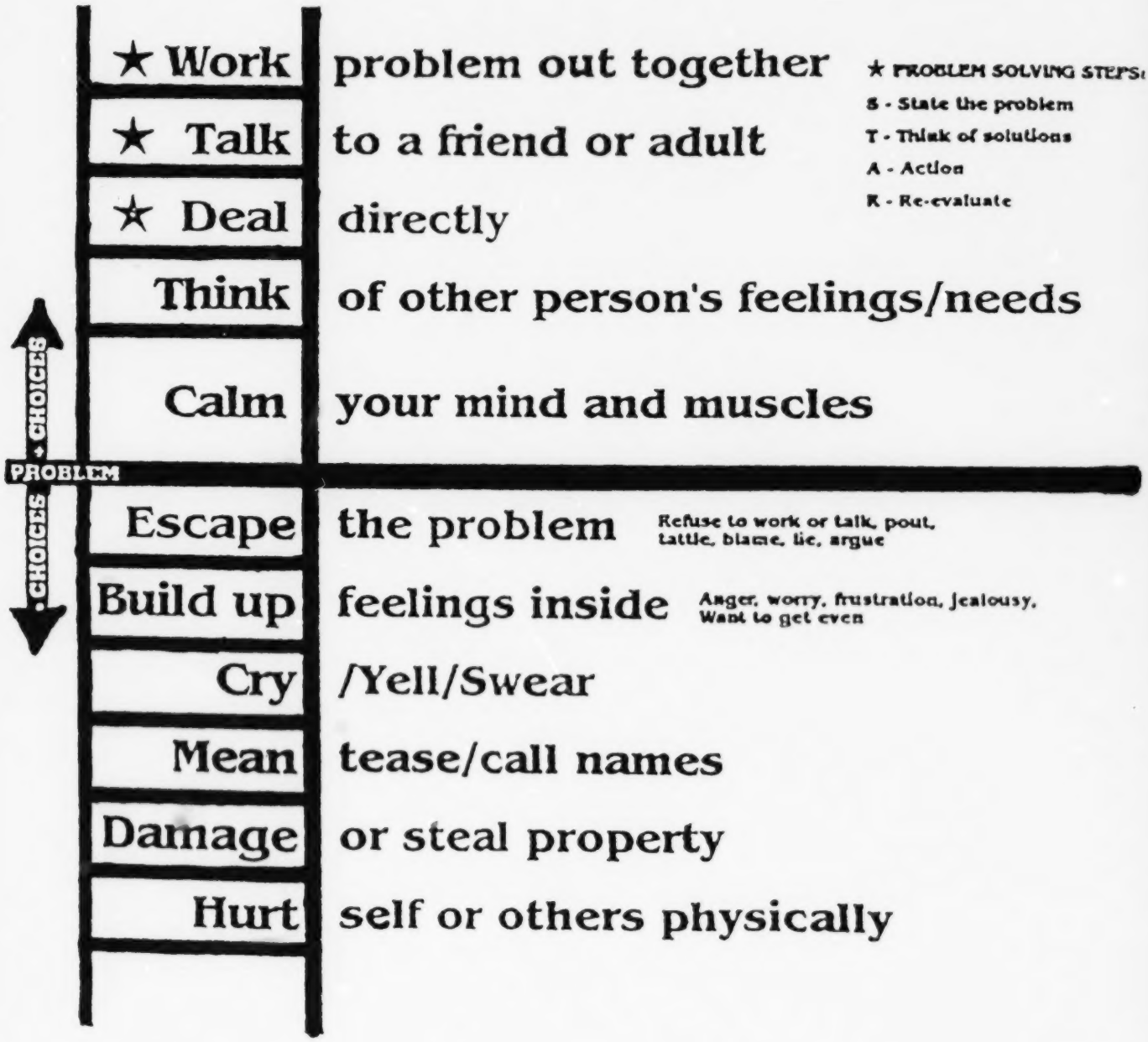
LADDER OF SUCCESS

Problem Solving Skills



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THE SCHOOL ANTICIPATES STUDENT NEEDS AND FILLS THEM WITHOUT FANFARE

- Teachers, staff and administrators are constantly alert to needs that required atention and attention was given.
- The focus of the school was on what students CAN DO not on what they can't do.
- This does not mean that student skill deficiencies are not dealt with. On the contrary, they focus instruction on the individual in most cases, communicating a "can do" spirit.

THE SCHOOL IS A TRUSTING PLACE

- Teachers are trusted to make important decisions about students, curriculum and life at the school.
- By the same token, students are trusted to make important decisions about their own learning. This takes several forms. Students are given significant choices about their learning. They are trusted to exercise some control over how they cover their materials and when they do it. In math, they might be given problems to choose from, or may be asked to make up their own problems to illustrate a concept.

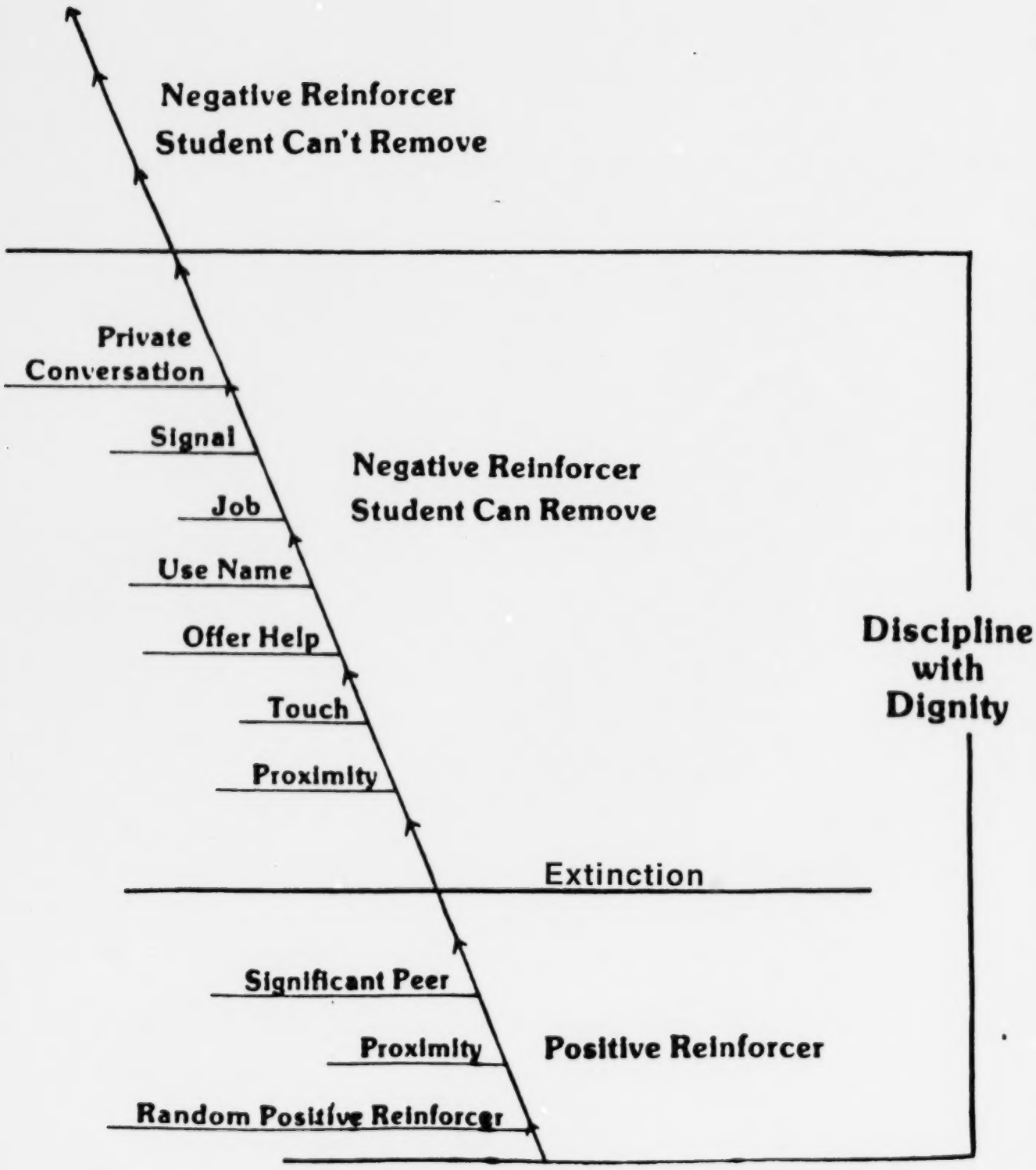
  Second, students are given guidelines by which to evaluate, monitor and control their own behavior.

  Third, emblems of trust are evident throughout the school, Libraries are not locked up, computer labs are left open. In most cases, schools report that their theft/damage losses were no higher when equipment was available than when it was locked up.

- Behavior is treated in context. Each lapse in responsible behavior is treated as a learning exercise. Students are asked to critique what they did, understand why it is inappropriate and suggest what they could do in a similar situation the next time.

- When discipline is needed, it is with dignity.

Discipline With Dignity Continuum



THE SCHOOL IS A CIVIL PLACE

- It stands to reason that a school that emphasizes excellence, rewards achievement and puts students to work on intellectual tasks that are appropriate for their development is a low-stress environment. As a result, people in the schools are relaxed, friendly, happy. That produces a kind of civility that is becoming increasingly rare in our fast-paced, high-stress culture.

You can use these characteristics above to evaluate your own classroom or your own school in terms of social-emotional climate. Hiam Ginott summarized social-emotional climate best in his quote -

> "I've come to a frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It's my personal approach that creates the climate. It's my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or de-humanized."
>
> ~HAIM GINOTT~

COMPASSION AND CARING

In an article entitled "The art and heart of teaching," Dr. Neila Conners summarizes what she learned over the course of a year in which she surveyed, interviewed and shadowed 32 outstanding middle level teachers throughout the country. She states that teaching is an art that begins in the heart. All the teachers she observed had a **PASSION FOR TEACHING** and **COMPASSION FOR THEIR STUDENTS.**

In an article entitled "What do parents really want from their middle schools?" Stephen Uebbing and John Cooper share the results of their extensive surveys with parents about educational priorities and outcomes. Throughout their surveys parents rated **EMPHASIS ON THE WHOLE CHILD** one of their highest program priorities. In terms of desired middle school outcomes, the researchers summarized the parents choices as follows:

> "In the final analysis it is critical for us to understand the very basic requirements and expectations that parents have of our schools. Help my child like himself or herself, provide strong academic skills and help to develop solid values."

Those three outcomes were followed by good study habits, good thinker/problem solver and likes school.

It is clear that effective teachers and effective middle schools have a heart for the whole child. No only do they deal with the intellectual development of the middle school student, but with caring and compassion, they deal with the social-emotional development as well.